

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

November 14, 2019

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Jennifer Schultz, Communications Director
Jennifer.Schultz@illinois.gov

**Illinois Joins *Girls Go CyberStart* Challenge to Encourage More High School Students
to Explore the Field of Cybersecurity**

Springfield, IL – Illinois will participate in the 2020 *Girls Go CyberStart* challenge to encourage the growth of young women in the field of cybersecurity. The training partnership with the SANS Institute will enable female high school students in Illinois to discover their talents in cybersecurity and learn more about computer security careers.

The *Girls Go CyberStart* program is designed for girls in grades 9 through 12 to help them explore topics such as cryptography and digital forensics. Students can participate at home or at school and the program is free for both schools and students. Teachers and students will not require knowledge or experience in IT or cybersecurity to participate in this program.

“The Department of Innovation & Technology (DoIT) is committed to growing STEM in Illinois and the *Girls Go CyberStart* makes a great addition to that effort,” stated Illinois CIO and DoIT Acting Secretary Ron Guerrier. “Our state will need a pipeline of new IT talent to fill future workforce needs and programs such as this one will provide young women with exposure to cyber careers, encourage interest in technology, and offer helpful resources to future cyber leaders.”

“I know what it’s like to be a trailblazer – to be the first woman in my position or the only woman leader in the room,” said State Superintendent of Education Dr. Carmen I. Ayala. “Mentors, encouragement, and access to resources make all the difference in the world to providing more opportunities for girls. *Girls Go CyberStart* provides these critical supports early in young women’s career journeys. I encourage all Illinois high schools to participate and expand the horizons of our female students.”

“Bringing awareness to STEM in education is a priority in the Rochester School District starting in kindergarten through high school because we feel it is important for all students to become leaders in these fields,” said Sheril Flynn, K-6 Technology Facilitator, Rochester CUSD 3A. “The *Girls Go CyberStart* program offers students across Illinois a chance to explore cybersecurity at the same time it is bringing awareness to future job opportunities.”

Registration for *Girls Go CyberStart* will open on December 2, 2019, with online programming commencing on January 13, 2020. Additional details and preregistration can be found at www.girlsgocyberstart.org.

###